

Sobonya, David P.

From: [REDACTED]  
Sent: Wednesday, January 29, 2014 11:03 PM  
To: FOIPARquest  
Subject: File on folk singer & activist Peter Seeger requested

b6

FOIA Office  
Federal Bureau of Investigation  
Washington, DC

Dear Sir or Madam,

This is a request for a copy of any and all files in your archive pertaining to the deceased folk singer and political activist Pete Seeger who was born May 3, 1919, in Patterson, NY and died January 27, 2014, in New York City, NY.

Attached is the Washington Post obit for Mr. Seeger along with the link to it. If you need more proof of Mr. Seeger's death, let me know and more will be provided.

I wish to receive all responsive public records in electronic format. Should you have any questions or need clarification, don't hesitate to contact me via email or postal mail.

Regards,  
Michael Petrelis

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[http://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/pete-seeger-legendary-folk-singer-dies-at-94/2014/01/28/36faeac0-c5dc-11df-94e1-c5afa35a9e59\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/pete-seeger-legendary-folk-singer-dies-at-94/2014/01/28/36faeac0-c5dc-11df-94e1-c5afa35a9e59_story.html)

## Pete Seeger, legendary folk singer, dies at 94



**Video:** Pete Seeger has passed away after six days in the hospital. Americans know Seeger as much for his activism as his singing.

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By Bart Barnes, Published: January 27 E-mail the writer

"I make my living as a banjo picker."

The time was Aug. 18, 1955. The setting: a hearing of the House Un-American Activities Committee, which was ferreting out Communist influences in post-World War II America.

Gallery



1 FEB 2014

Pete Seeger, the ultimate folkie, dies at 94: A look at the long career of the legendary singer.

Gallery



Notable deaths of 2014: A look at those who have died this year.

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The banjo-picking witness before the committee was Pete Seeger, and he had been asked, "What is your profession or occupation?"

"I have worked at many things," said Mr. Seeger, "and my main profession is a student of American folklore."

Over the next half-century, Mr. Seeger would become more than a student of American folklore. He would become a vital part of it.

The committee would cite him for contempt for refusing to cooperate. But the committee would fade into oblivion over the years.

Pete Seeger would endure.

Mr. Seeger, a 20th-century troubadour who inspired and led a renaissance of folk music in the United States with his trademark five-string banjo and songs of love, peace, brotherhood, work and protest, died Jan. 27 at a hospital in New York City. He was 94.

His grandson Kitama Cahill-Jackson confirmed his death to the Associated Press. The cause was not reported.

For more than 50 years, Mr. Seeger roamed America, singing on street corners and in saloons, migrant labor camps, hobo jungles, union halls, schools, churches and concert auditoriums. He helped write, arrange or revive such perennial favorites as "If I Had a Hammer," "Where Have All the Flowers Gone?" and "Kisses Sweeter Than Wine" and popularized the anthem of the civil rights movement, "We Shall Overcome."

"Once called 'America's tuning fork,' Pete Seeger believed deeply in the power of song," President Obama said in a statement. "But more importantly, he believed in the power of community — to stand up for what's right, speak out against what's wrong, and move this country closer to the America he knew we could be."

"Over the years, Pete used his voice — and his hammer — to strike blows for worker's rights and civil rights; world peace and environmental conservation. And he always invited us to sing along. For reminding us where we come from and showing us where we need to go, we will always be grateful to Pete Seeger."

Tall and reed-thin, Mr. Seeger was a recognizable figure for generations of listeners. And with dozens of top-selling records and albums, he became one of the most enduring and best-loved folk singers of his generation. He also was one of the few remaining links to two of the 20th century's early giants of American folk music: Huddie Ledbetter, the black ex-convict from Texas and Louisiana better known as Lead Belly, and Woody Guthrie, the legendary songwriter from Oklahoma.

The classic song "Goodnight Irene" was a Lead Belly tune that Mr. Seeger adapted for the Weavers, a quartet he helped form after World War II. The 1948 recording by the Weavers sold 2 million copies.

From Guthrie, Mr. Seeger learned to express political and social criticism through music and song. Over time, dissent and left-wing expression became hallmarks of his artistic repertoire. During the anti-Communist "Red Scare" of the 1950s, he was called to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee.

"I have sung in hobo jungles, and I have sung for the Rockefellers, and I am proud that I have never refused to sing for anybody," he told the committee. "I have never done anything of any conspiratorial nature. ... I love my country very deeply."

Guthrie and Mr. Seeger had been colleagues in the Almanac Singers in the early 1940s and collaborated on union and labor songs. For the next half-century, Mr. Seeger changed the focus of his protest songs with the times to encompass social justice, civil rights, peace and disarmament, and environmental conservation.

At a Kennedy Center Honors ceremony in 1994, President Bill Clinton described Mr. Seeger as "an inconvenient artist who dared to sing things as he saw them." The news media sometimes called him a "pied piper of musical dissent." By the dawn of the new millennium, Mr. Seeger had become the widely acknowledged, if unofficial, grand old man of American folk music.

He regarded folk songs as music meant to be sung by crowds and bonded with audiences around the world by inviting them to sing along with him. During a performance at Moscow's Tchaikovsky Concert Hall, he led an audience of 10,000 Russians in a four-part harmony of "Michael, Row the Boat Ashore."

"I just tap out a beat, pick a few chords and say, 'Come on, you folks know this old tune.' Pretty soon the audience'll be singing the song to me," Mr. Seeger told the Chicago Tribune in 1994.

"You can't sit idle at a Pete Seeger concert," folk-music collector and performer Ralph Rinzler wrote in The Washington Post in 1972. "Audiences for 30 years have sung, clapped and risen to their feet with enthusiasm. Pete strides onstage, loosens his tie, picks the five-string, adding other instruments as he talks, spins yarns, preaches and sings songs of the nation's and the world's people — new ballads, old ones, lyrical laments and hard driving, keen-edged cutters." Whether leading a singalong of college students or performing in a formal concert, Mr. Seeger said, he tried to re-create the atmosphere in which his songs were first sung. He sang in a light, pleasing baritone. His goal, he said, was "to put a song on people's lips, instead of just in their ears."

He helped bring dozens of classics into the idiom of popular folk music. These included Guthrie's "This Land Is Your Land" and "So Long, It's Been Good to Know Yuh," Lead Belly's "Midnight Special," the folk song "On Top of Old Smoky," the Hebrew song "Tzena, Tzena, Tzena," the Zulu hit "Wimoweh" and the likes of "Turn, Turn, Turn," "Guantanamera," the nonsense song "I Know an Old Lady (Who Swallowed a Fly)" and "Waist Deep in the Big Muddy," which became popular as a protest song during the Vietnam War era.

Chance and happenstance historically have driven the evolution of folk music, and so they did for many of the most popular tunes associated with Mr. Seeger. "If I Had a Hammer," for example, began as a tune Mr. Seeger made up at the piano one afternoon in 1949 with Weavers colleague Lee Hays.

It was known in its original form as "The Hammer Song" and did not achieve popularity when the Weavers recorded it. But the lyrics drew the attention of federal investigators who during the 1950s thought that, used in songs, words such as "peace" and "freedom" were codes for left-wing subversives and communists.

Not until Peter, Paul and Mary recorded a revised version in 1962 did the song become a hit. It remained a centerpiece of Mr. Seeger's concerts. "Very few people sing it as I originally wrote it," Mr. Seeger said later. "I call this the folk process, and I'm delighted to see it carrying on."

"We Shall Overcome," for its part, was composed by a Philadelphia Baptist clergyman, C.A. Tindley, in 1903. The original title was "I'll Overcome." In 1945, an early civil rights activist, Zilphia Horton, heard striking tobacco workers singing the song on a picket line in Charleston, S.C. Horton taught it to Mr. Seeger, who made revisions and added a banjo part. He, in turn, taught the song to folk singer Guy Carawan. After revising it further, Carawan sang it at a convention of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in the 1960s. From there "We Shall Overcome" went around the world. Peter Seeger was born May 3, 1919, in New York City. His father, Charles Seeger, was a conscientious objector during World War I and an eminent music scholar, reportedly the first to teach a musicology course in the United States. His mother was a professional composer and violinist, and his stepmother was a writer of children's books in which folk music figured prominently.

Political dissent had been a family tradition for generations. A great-grandfather was a 19th-century abolitionist. The World War I poet Alan Seeger, who wrote "I Have a Rendezvous With Death," was an uncle.

As a child, Mr. Seeger accompanied his father on visits to friends in the city. Years later, he recalled hearing the folk song "John Henry" played on a harmonica by artist Thomas Hart Benton in Greenwich Village.

In 1935, Mr. Seeger attended a folk music festival near Asheville, N.C., with his father. There he first encountered the five-string banjo. He found that the instrument produced music that was different from the sound of the four-string, short-necked banjos commonly used by jazz bands in the 1920s. It became Mr. Seeger's musical trademark (although he also played a 12-string guitar and wood flute).

He attended public schools in Nyack, N.Y., and boarding schools in Connecticut before enrolling in 1936 at Harvard University, where one of his classmates was John F. Kennedy. Uninterested in his studies and disillusioned by the social havoc wrought by the Depression, Mr. Seeger dropped out midway through his sophomore year. For a period during his Harvard years, he attended meetings of the Communist Party.

He worked briefly in the folklore archives of the Library of Congress, and for a time he traveled through the state of New York, painting watercolors of houses in exchange for room and board. But mostly he hitchhiked across the United States, mixing with like-minded political leftists, singing and picking up new tunes and techniques.

In the course of this odyssey, he once said, he learned "a little something from everybody," and along the way he acquired a vast repertoire of ballads, spirituals and blues songs. Guthrie and Lead Belly were among the many musicians the young Mr. Seeger met in this period.

Years later, he said that one of his primary career achievements had been "to let a future generation know that such people as Woody and Lead Belly once lived."

In the late 1930s, he met Toshi-Aline Ohta at a square-dance club in New York City. Her mother was American, her father Japanese. Amid the rampant anti-Japanese prejudice in the United States during World War II, the couple married in 1943 while Mr. Seeger was on furlough from Army service.

Toshi Seeger died in 2013. Mr. Seeger's survivors include three children, Daniel Seeger of Topanga, Calif., Mika Seeger of Tiverton, R.I., and Tinya Seeger of Beacon, N.Y.; two half-sisters; eight grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren.

After leaving the military, Mr. Seeger formed the Weavers with three other singers, Hays, Ronnie Gilbert and Fred Hellerman. In the late 1940s and early '50s, they sang on national radio and TV programs and in leading nightclubs and theaters. By 1952, sales of their recordings of such songs as "On Top of Old Smoky," "So Long, It's Been Good to Know Yuh" and "Goodnight Irene" topped 4 million.

## EXPLANATION OF EXEMPTIONS

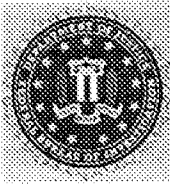
### SUBSECTIONS OF TITLE 5, UNITED STATES CODE, SECTION 552

- (b)(1) (A) specifically authorized under criteria established by an Executive order to be kept secret in the interest of national defense or foreign policy and (B) are in fact properly classified to such Executive order;
- (b)(2) related solely to the internal personnel rules and practices of an agency;
- (b)(3) specifically exempted from disclosure by statute (other than section 552b of this title), provided that such statute (A) requires that the matters be withheld from the public in such a manner as to leave no discretion on issue, or (B) establishes particular criteria for withholding or refers to particular types of matters to be withheld;
- (b)(4) trade secrets and commercial or financial information obtained from a person and privileged or confidential;
- (b)(5) inter-agency or intra-agency memorandums or letters which would not be available by law to a party other than an agency in litigation with the agency;
- (b)(6) personnel and medical files and similar files the disclosure of which would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy;
- (b)(7) records or information compiled for law enforcement purposes, but only to the extent that the production of such law enforcement records or information ( A ) could reasonably be expected to interfere with enforcement proceedings, ( B ) would deprive a person of a right to a fair trial or an impartial adjudication, ( C ) could reasonably be expected to constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy, ( D ) could reasonably be expected to disclose the identity of confidential source, including a State, local, or foreign agency or authority or any private institution which furnished information on a confidential basis, and, in the case of record or information compiled by a criminal law enforcement authority in the course of a criminal investigation, or by an agency conducting a lawful national security intelligence investigation, information furnished by a confidential source, ( E ) would disclose techniques and procedures for law enforcement investigations or prosecutions, or would disclose guidelines for law enforcement investigations or prosecutions if such disclosure could reasonably be expected to risk circumvention of the law, or ( F ) could reasonably be expected to endanger the life or physical safety of any individual;
- (b)(8) contained in or related to examination, operating, or condition reports prepared by, on behalf of, or for the use of an agency responsible for the regulation or supervision of financial institutions; or
- (b)(9) geological and geophysical information and data, including maps, concerning wells.

### SUBSECTIONS OF TITLE 5, UNITED STATES CODE, SECTION 552a

- (d)(5) information compiled in reasonable anticipation of a civil action proceeding;
- (j)(2) material reporting investigative efforts pertaining to the enforcement of criminal law including efforts to prevent, control, or reduce crime or apprehend criminals;
- (k)(1) information which is currently and properly classified pursuant to an Executive order in the interest of the national defense or foreign policy, for example, information involving intelligence sources or methods;
- (k)(2) investigatory material compiled for law enforcement purposes, other than criminal, which did not result in loss of a right, benefit or privilege under Federal programs, or which would identify a source who furnished information pursuant to a promise that his/her identity would be held in confidence;
- (k)(3) material maintained in connection with providing protective services to the President of the United States or any other individual pursuant to the authority of Title 18, United States Code, Section 3056;
- (k)(4) required by statute to be maintained and used solely as statistical records;
- (k)(5) investigatory material compiled solely for the purpose of determining suitability, eligibility, or qualifications for Federal civilian employment or for access to classified information, the disclosure of which would reveal the identity of the person who furnished information pursuant to a promise that his/her identity would be held in confidence;
- (k)(6) testing or examination material used to determine individual qualifications for appointment or promotion in Federal Government service the release of which would compromise the testing or examination process;
- (k)(7) material used to determine potential for promotion in the armed services, the disclosure of which would reveal the identity of the person who furnished the material pursuant to a promise that his/her identity would be held in confidence.

U.S. Department of Justice



Federal Bureau of Investigation  
Washington, D.C. 20535

February 4, 2014

MICHAEL PETRELIS



b6

FOIPA Request No.: 1251101-000  
Subject: SEEGER, PETE

Dear Michael Petrelis:

This is in response to your Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request.

A search of the Central Records System maintained at FBI Headquarters indicated that records potentially responsive to the FOIA have been sent to the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). Since these records were not reviewed, it is not known if they are actually responsive to the FOIA.

If you wish to review these potentially responsive records, send your request to NARA at the following address using file number 100-HQ-200845 as a reference:

National Archives and Records Administration  
8601 Adelphi Road  
College Park, MD 20740-6001

By standard FBI practice and pursuant to FOIA exemption (b)(7)(E) and Privacy Act exemption (j)(2) [5 U.S.C. §§ 552/552a (b)(7)(E), (j)(2)], this response neither confirms nor denies the existence of your subject's name on any watch lists.

For your information, Congress excluded three discrete categories of law enforcement and national security records from the requirements of the FOIA. See 5 U.S.C. § 552(c) (2006 & Supp. IV (2010)). This response is limited to those records that are subject to the requirements of the FOIA. This is a standard notification that is given to all our requesters and should not be taken as an indication that excluded records do, or do not, exist.

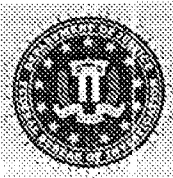
You may file an appeal by writing to the Director, Office of Information Policy (OIP), U.S. Department of Justice, 1425 New York Ave., NW, Suite 11050, Washington, D.C. 20530-0001, or you may submit an appeal through OIP's eFOIA portal at <http://www.justice.gov/oip/efoia-portal.html>. Your appeal must be received by OIP within sixty (60) days from the date of this letter in order to be considered timely. The envelope and the letter should be clearly marked "Freedom of Information Appeal." Please cite the FOIPA Request Number in any correspondence to us for proper identification of your request.

Enclosed for your information is a copy of the FBI Fact Sheet.

Sincerely,

David M. Hardy  
Section Chief,  
Record/Information  
Dissemination Section  
Records Management Division

Enclosure



## FBI FACT SHEET

- The primary functions of the FBI are national security and law enforcement.
- The FBI does not keep a file on every citizen of the United States.
- The FBI was not established until 1908 and we have very few records prior to the 1920s.
- FBI files generally contain reports of FBI investigations of a wide range of matters, including counterterrorism, counter-intelligence, cyber crime, public corruption, civil rights, organized crime, white collar crime, major thefts, violent crime, and applicants.
- The FBI does not issue clearances or non-clearances for anyone other than its own personnel or persons having access to FBI facilities. Background investigations for security clearances are conducted by many different Government agencies. Persons who received a clearance while in the military or employed with some other government agency should contact that entity. Most government agencies have websites which are accessible on the internet which have their contact information.
- A criminal history summary check or "rap sheet" is NOT the same as an "FBI file." It is a listing of information taken from fingerprint cards and related documents submitted to the FBI in connection with arrests, federal employment, naturalization or military service. The subject of a "rap sheet" may obtain a copy by submitting a written request to FBI, Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS) Division, Record Request, 1000 Custer Hollow Road, Clarksburg, West Virginia 26306. Along with a specific written request, the individual must submit a new full set of his/her fingerprints in order to locate the record, establish positive identification, and ensure that an individual's records are not disseminated to an unauthorized person. The fingerprint submission must include the subject's name, date and place of birth. There is a required fee of \$18 for this service, which must be submitted by money order or certified check made payable to the Treasury of the United States. A credit card payment option is also available. Forms for this option and additional directions may be obtained by accessing the FBI Web site at [www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/background-checks/background\\_checks](http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/background-checks/background_checks).
- The National Name Check Program (NNCP) conducts a search of the FBI's Universal Index (UNI) to identify any information contained in FBI records that may be associated with an individual and provides the results of that search to a requesting federal, state or local agency. Names are searched in a multitude of combinations and phonetic spellings to ensure all records are located. The NNCP also searches for both "main" and "cross reference" files. A main file is an entry that carries the name corresponding to the subject of a file, while a cross reference is merely a mention of an individual contained in a file. The results from a search of this magnitude can result in several "hits" and "idents" on an individual. In each instance where UNI has identified a name variation or reference, information must be reviewed to determine if it is applicable to the individual in question.
- The Record/Information Dissemination Section (RIDS) searches for records and provides copies of FBI files responsive to Freedom of Information or Privacy Act (FOIPA) requests for information. RIDS provides responsive documents to requesters seeking "reasonably described information." For a FOIPA search, the subject's name, event, activity, or business is searched to determine whether there is an associated investigative file. This is called a "main file search" and differs from the NNCP search.

FOR GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE FBI, VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT  
[www.fbi.gov](http://www.fbi.gov)

Then, a magazine known as Red Channels named the Weavers — and Mr. Seeger in particular — as Communist Party sympathizers. There were calls for them to be blacklisted from professional entertainment engagements.

At the time, Sen. Joseph R. McCarthy (R-Wis.) regularly made headlines with charges of Communist infiltration of government agencies, academia and the entertainment industry. In short order, almost all the Weavers' nightclub, concert, radio, TV and recording engagements evaporated. Mr. Seeger's public career was abruptly curtailed.

In 1955, the House Un-American Activities Committee began an investigation of Communist influence in professional entertainment and subpoenaed Mr. Seeger. He volunteered to discuss his music at length with the committee, and he offered to sing his songs. But he declined to answer questions about political associations or whether certain songs were sung at Communist gatherings, and he declined to invoke his constitutional right of protection from self-incrimination.

"I think these are very improper questions for any American to be asked, especially under such compulsion as this," he said.

Convicted of contempt of Congress, he was sentenced to a year in jail. After a prolonged appeal process, the conviction was overturned in 1962 because of a technical flaw in the indictment. The government never retried him.

"I apologize for once believing Stalin was just a hard driver, not a supremely cruel dictator," he told The Washington Post in 1994. "I ask people to broaden their definition of socialism. Our ancestors were all socialists: You killed a deer and maybe you got the best cut, but you wouldn't let it rot, you shared it. Similarly, I tell socialists, every society has a post office and none of them is efficient. No post office anywhere invented Federal Express."

With the resurgence of folk music later in the 1960s, Mr. Seeger's music became popular again. His concert and recording opportunities swelled. In 1967, the Smothers Brothers negotiated a guest appearance for Mr. Seeger on their TV program, and he appeared in a series of one-hour programs on public television. By that time, the Weavers had long since disbanded.

During the 1970s, the '80s and the early part of the '90s, Mr. Seeger continued to make regular concert performances and recordings, and his compositions were recorded by other groups. But by the mid-1990s, his voice had grown weaker. He struggled increasingly to reach very high and very low notes.

In 1949, Mr. Seeger bought 17 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> acres on a mountainside near the Hudson River in Beacon, N.Y., about 60 miles north of Manhattan. He built a log cabin and lived there with his family for several years before moving to a larger house on the same property. In his later years, he was active in environmental causes, including efforts to clean up the Hudson River. Until the end of his life, he remained a beloved figure. The broad public affection for him was on full display in 2009 when, at 89, he joined Bruce Springsteen in a rendition of "This Land Is Your Land" at a concert on the Lincoln Memorial during President Obama's inaugural festivities. He was nominated for a Grammy this year in the spoken word album category for "The Storm King."

"I call them all love songs," Mr. Seeger once said of his music. "They tell of love of man and woman, and parents and children, love of country, freedom, beauty, mankind, the world, love of searching for truth and other unknowns. But, of course, love alone is not enough."